



Healthy Aging in Neighborhoods of Diversity across the Life Span

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Adult literacy

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Learning throughout the lifespan

Literacy is the skill for understanding what we read. It is more than just the ability to read. Literacy is the ability to make sense out of written material.

Across the United States and in Baltimore, many adults have difficulty reading. Fortunately, there are programs to help people improve their literacy skills.

*Literacy is the skill for understanding
what we read*

Why is literacy important?

Many adults have problems understanding what they read. This sometimes means they have difficulties applying for jobs, getting a license, or understand prescription bottles. Adults with reading problems may struggle to help their children or grandchildren with their homework. They may have problems understanding their lease or nutrition information at the store.

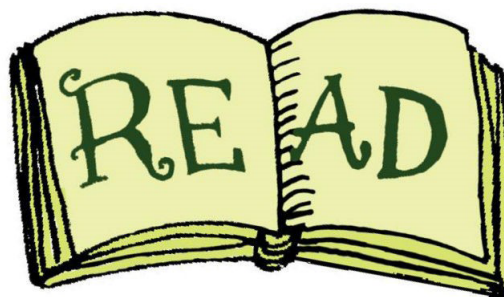
Sometimes, problems with reading become problems finding or keeping a job. These days, jobs paying more than minimum wage require a high school diploma or high school level skills. In Baltimore, poor literacy skills are often why adults cannot find or keep their jobs.

According to the 2014 American Community Survey in Baltimore, over 90,000 adults do not have a high school diploma. The unemployment rate for adults without a

high school diploma is just over 20%, which is higher than with at least a high school diploma.

Literacy and HANDLS

HANDLS examines participants' literacy with two tests, the WRAT and the REALM-SF. The Wide Range Achievement Test – WRAT – measures basic word recognition skills. The WRAT has two parts for measuring letter recognition and word reading. Participants are asked to



read 42 words out loud. The words are unrelated to one another. WRAT scores estimate participants' grade reading level. For example, the WRAT might indicate that a participant's reading corresponds to an 8th grade level and another participant's reading might correspond to a 10th grade level.

The Rapid Estimate of Adult Literacy in Medicine – REALM – measures health literacy. Health literacy is the skill to understand written material about your health. The REALM is a short test in which a participant reads 7 words. Participants can say "pass" if they do not recognize a word. Recognizing these words indicates if participants are likely to understand medical vocabulary. Doctors may use medical language their patients may not understand. This makes it hard for patients to re-

cover from illnesses. The REALM helps us assess whether participants understand medical vocabulary. This information may help doctors to adjust their language so their patients can understand what they are saying.

How is literacy related to health?

We are interested in literacy because these skills are related to health. People with low literacy are more likely to report poorer health than others with better skills. Why is this? Health literacy determines how well a person can read and understand basic health information. Health literacy also helps people make decisions. Up to 90 million American adults report difficulty with health information. They also report problems following through with treatments such as taking medications. If someone cannot read a diagnosis or prescription they received from the doctor, they may not pay much attention to it, even if it is key to recovering good health. People with higher literacy are likely to get preventive healthcare, such as cancer screenings and annual medical exams. They are also more likely to stick with treatment recommendations.

Resources for adults in Baltimore City

There are some free resources in Baltimore that may help improve literacy. There are also some affordable programs for improving literacy. Please share these resources with your family and friends if you think they might benefit from literacy skill training.

- **Strong City Baltimore** has an adult learning center and offers instruction in adult basic education, English as a second language (ESL), and workforce training. Instruction is offered free to adults ages 16 and older. Call 410-261-3500 or visit their website (<https://www.strongcitybaltimore.org/>).
- The **South Baltimore Learning Center** offers classes in adult basic education, pre-GED and GED, and computer skills. The center also offers career counseling to adults searching for jobs. The adult basic education and pre-GED classes are free. Call 410-625-4215 or visit their website (<http://southbaltimorelearns.org/>).
- The **Learning is for Tomorrow** (LIFT) program responds to the needs of southeast Baltimore residents who want to improve basic education skills. This program offers classes in literacy, adult basic education, GED preparation, and computer lab classes. LIFT also offers accommodations

for adults with learning disabilities and vision or hearing deficits. Call 410-522-1705 or visit their website (<http://www.liftbaltimore.org/>).

- The **Maryland Literacy Hotline** offers adult literacy and basic education classes, GED exam preparation classes, and English as a second language (ESL) classes. Many classes are free of charge. Call 410-752-3595 or visit their website (<http://www.facebook.com/MDLiteracy>).
- **Baltimore City Community College** offers classes in Adult Basic Education, Basic Skills (such as reading, writing, and math), and GED preparation. Baltimore City Community College is the largest provider of literacy services in Baltimore City. Courses are offered at low-cost or no-cost. To take an assessment for the GED program, you can visit the downtown Harbor Campus, Liberty Campus, or Reisterstown Plaza Center (call for an appointment). Call 410-986-3200 or visit their website (<https://www.bccc.edu/Page/43>).
- The **Power House Community Center** has an Adult Resource Center and Workforce Development Program. Contact Power House to find out if you are eligible to enroll for the Target Investment Zone Workforce Development Program. This program allows members to participate in life skills workshops, career events, digital literacy training, and training for financial and budget strategies. Call 410-685-0295 or visit their website (https://www.livingclassrooms.org/ourp_workforce_development_center.php).
- The **Hampden Family Center** offers adult literacy classes in partnership with Strong City Baltimore. These classes include reading, writing, math, and GED preparation. Classes meet Tuesday and Thursday evenings, and sessions last for 10 weeks. Call 410-467-8710 or visit their website (<http://www.hampdenfamilycenter.org/adults.shtml>).

Using the Public Library

The Enoch Pratt Free Library has 22 locations in Baltimore City. There is probably a library branch located in or close to your neighborhood. The public library offers free services to everyone. Services include book borrowing, computers, internet access, and copy, printing, and fax services.

The Enoch Pratt Free Library offers help with homework. The library has a Job and Career Center, and

librarians for personal help. The Job and Career Center is in the Central Branch on Cathedral Street. This center has materials on job hunting, resume writing, interview techniques, career planning, and occupation types. You can reserve a computer for job searches, writing resumes, or applying for jobs. If the Central Branch is not convenient for you, the Mobile Job Center is available. The Mobile Job Center looks a lot like our MRVs. The vehicle has 12 computer workstations. Library staff give computer help, information about job and careers, and referrals to Adult Basic Education and GED classes. Librarians can also help you sign up for an email address, prepare for job interviews, create a resume, and help you search for a job. The Mobile Job Center stops in the following communities: Westport, Mt. Winans, Lakeland; Brooklyn, Curtis Bay, Hawkins Point; Greater Rosemont, Mondawmin, Allendale, Irvington, South Hilton; Old Town, Middle East; Greenmount East; Druid Heights, Penn North, Upton; and Park Heights. Check the library's website (<http://www.prattlibrary.org/>) to see which day of the week the Mobile Job Center will be

card at the Enoch Pratt Free Library. You can apply for a library card online through the library's website (<http://www.prattlibrary.org/services/librarycards.aspx?id=6721>), or in-person at any library branch. All you need for a library card is some identification with your name, address, phone number, and birth date. With a library card, you can borrow materials such as books, CDs, DVDs, audiobooks, maps, and magazines. For more information about library programs and services at your local branch, contact the library by phone (410-396-5430) or visit the website. (<http://www.prattlibrary.org/>).

Reading for health

Reading may benefit your health. Reading a story book often reduces stress. Reading before bed time may help you relax so you can have a good night's sleep. Reading everyday may also improve memory and concentration. Some studies have shown that reading may also improve self-confidence.

We have all been presented with different opportunities in life. Remember, it is never too late to create opportunities to learn and grow. One way to invest in your self-care is to learn new skills. Empower yourself through knowledge! If you know someone who may benefit from the information in this article, please share this information with them.

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in your community.

The library also offers a wide variety of public events and free classes. Examples of classes include basic computer skills and pre-GED. Examples of events include trivia, film viewings, meditation, fitness programs, and entertaining programs for children. All you need is a library card. Everyone who lives in Maryland can get a library

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The Quarterly Newsletter for the HANDLS Community Healthy Aging in Neighborhoods of Diversity across the Life Span

The purpose of this study is to learn about changes in health over time. Using our medical research vehicles, we want to study as many people with different backgrounds as we can. We want this study to help us understand healthy aging by examining the effects of different backgrounds on changes in health over time. The information that we gather will help improve health and prevent disabilities. We want to do this for people from all backgrounds, particularly those in poor and minority communities.

**For information about our study call 1-877-677-9538
or visit our website handls.nih.gov**

